

Interview Transcript

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Interviewee: Sister Mary Williams

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Sean Gary, Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.

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Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments]

[00:00:23.08] SHANNON GREEN: This is Mount Saint Mary's University at Carondelet Center, Monday, October 23, 2017, Shannon Green interviewing Sister Mary Williams.

[00:00:36.07] SHANNON GREEN: So Sister Mary, would you get us started by stating your full name and your age for us?

[00:00:41.09] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Oh my goodness. I have to start with my age? [smiles] I am Sister Mary Williams. I'm eighty-seven years old, which I find hard to believe. But that seems to creep up on people. [all laugh].

[00:00:55.00] SHANNON GREEN: Sister Mary, would you tell us a little bit about where you were born and grew up, about your family?

[00:01:00.13] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I will. I was born in the little town of Pasco, Washington. And at that point, in 1930--so it was the beginning of the Depression [Great Depression (1929-1930)]. It was also a very happy little village to live in. It was more than a village, but-- I had a brother, and a sister, and myself. I was the baby. And my father was editor and publisher of a little weekly newspaper. So we grew up with journalism in our heads, and also politics. But we also grew up with the Sisters of St. Joseph of Carondelet (CSJs), because they sponsored a little hospital--Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital. And there were so few Catholics in town--it was a very Protestant part of the world--that we--the Sisters were like part of our family. They were really wonderful ladies--hardworking, fun people. And my mother didn't have a lot of Catholic friends. So she spent a lot of time getting acquainted with the Sisters. We would go for our walks--the three little kids--and she'd take us for a walk, and we'd walk the walks up to the hospital, which is just about halfway across town. And we would run around with our tricycles and our little bicycles and things around the Hospital, stopping into the kitchen to get sugar cookies, because the nuns always fed us when we got there. And my mother would be chatting with her friends. And then they would come down to our house, and come and have lunch or tea or something. And I always knew that they were very, very happy women--very nice to us, loving to the families in town. So I know I'm getting off onto vocation, but I was really headed to the convent long before I knew I was. And that was nice. Then, in 19--well, we went through the whole Depression, and made it, as everybody seemed to make it. But then in the early 1940s, the war [World War II], and about--I think it was 1942--I'm getting off into a long story but I love this story, my father was at his office, and a strange man came in. He had come by train--he walked down the street to the editor's office, and he said, "Mr. Williams, there's going to be something coming into your town which is a high secret for the nation. And we're going to ask you not to put any comments into the paper that you're population is growing, that things are happening. We ask you just not to mention it." Now you can't do that with media any more. But he did that with every newspaper in that part of the state. And what it was, was the project for Hanford and the building of the atomic bomb [Manhattan Project (1942-1946)]. And that was happening in our town, and no one--well, everyone said, "What is it? What is it?" But nobody talked about it in the newspapers. So it remained a deep secret until Hiroshima [dropping of first atomic bomb on Hiroshima, Japan, 1945]. It was a very interesting world. So then everything grew in the town. Lots of things happened. So I had an interesting growing up.

[00:04:37.14] SHANNON GREEN: Do you remember some of the names of those Sisters from the hospital?

[00:04:40.21] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I do. Let me see if I can remember them. I loved those-- Mother

Mildred [??] was one. She was the Superior and CEO, I guess you would say. But life was small in those days. Mother Mildred and--well right now I can't think of their names. I can see them.

[00:05:04.15] SHANNON GREEN: Can you say a little bit about how the CSJs ended up in Pasco?

[00:05:09.05] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Well, I wrote a book about it ["All Things New" (2014)].

[00:05:11.14] SHANNON GREEN: I know you did. [all laugh]. Which I have read, but--more than once.

[00:05:13.25] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Oh good, thank you. I'll just refer you to my book. They--I'm trying to think--from that part of it. It started in Lewiston, Idaho, which is about a hundred and thirty miles from Pasco. It's the same part of town--same part of the state, but it's across into--it's down in the southeast part of the state. They needed a hospital, and there was nothing--the doctors would say--in Pasco they said, "We need--if anyone gets sick we have to go to their house--we have to treat them. If they need hospitalization we'll take them to--". They had a little three-bedroom house where they had three beds. And that was the hospital then. And if the person needed surgery, they did it on the kitchen table. They had hot water boiling on the stove to--for sanitation. It was an amazing thing. And the doctors kept saying, "We need a hospital!" So they began to raise a little money and began to look around for Sisters. And the same thing had happened at Lewiston so--a few years before ours happened. So they looked around and there were Sisters in Lewiston, and they got permission for six nuns to come over to Pasco. So they arrived in 1916. We just celebrated the hundredth anniversary last year, so we're--now the hospital is one hundred and one years old. And the Sisters came by train and arrived and only two of them I think were trained for hospital work. Maybe a few more. One was a pretty good administrator. And then there were a couple--there was one that was a cook, and one that cleaned and did things like that. But six Sisters founded that hospital. They rented a little hotel. And all the ladies in town that cared about it and they cleaned the hotel and all of that. So it opened in 1916, I think it was September. Oh, don't be mad at me that I can't remember the date. But anyway, in September 1916. So that was the beginning. And my folks married and came to town in 1922. So everything was brand new then. And my mother and dad both got involved supporting the hospital. Dad would help out with legal advice, and my mother got right in there and helped. So--it was an exciting time.

[00:08:02.03] SHANNON GREEN: And when you say politics were part of the family--I'm just curious, what - -was it some of the dinner conversation?

[00:08:05.19] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Roosevelt [Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945), US President 1933-1945]. Oh very much. Very few Catholics in town and lots of Democrats. So I remember--I was telling this story the other day. I remember that we were playing--I was playing with the kids outside the school at recess. And one kid came up to me--must have been election time--lot of excitement. One kid came up to me and said, "Well Mary, are you a Democrat or Republican." And I said, "I'm a Catholic!" [laughs]. And I was going to defend who I was forever. But we were very strong Roosevelt people. I think most people were. They were feeling like they were saved during that Depression. And my mother was a--she became very active in the Democratic party. And I--she was--had a few positions in the state for Democratic women. So it was an exciting world. One time, President Roosevelt's daughter Anna [Anna Eleanor Roosevelt Dall Boettiger Halsted (1906-1975), American newspaper editor and author] came to town and came to dinner at our house. So, you know, very few people in town that had the homes where they could entertain or whatever. So--we had good things going on.

[00:09:22.03] SHANNON GREEN: Well I'm curious then if you said that you respond as "I'm a Catholic". [all laugh]. So how did these--at that time, how did these identities come together or not, or--

[00:09:31.12] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Well, there were--it was a real minority of Catholics in town. Very small--and it still is. It's quite a Protestant part of the world, and everything else now, you know--but strong little parishes here and there. So--and we were so proud of being Catholics. And of course the Sisters were there, and they would--they taught little vacation classes for us, and we learned our Catechism that way. Yeah.

[00:10:02.20] SHANNON GREEN: So equal or maybe or not equal--engagement in church and engagement in politics.

[00:10:08.21] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Oh yes. And my folks were very educated. So we read--my mother gave book reviews all over the county, you know. So she was very active too. And we all eventually went to college and on into graduate work. My brother became a really good journalist and had a wonderful career. My sister had a number of children, so that she didn't have as much time for a career, but she wrote for the--in Seattle, she wrote for the archdiocesan paper. So she was writing and raising children. And then I was teaching writing by the time I got into my career.

[00:10:51.04] SHANNON GREEN: So tell us about your call a little bit more, or how you came to Mount Saint Mary's--how did you continue your relationship with the Sisters?

[00:11:00.17] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I didn't come to Mount Saint Mary's--not until I was twenty-four and entered the convent. I went to--my sister and I both went to the College of St. Catherine, which is a CSJ college--now a university, also--in St. Paul [Minnesota]--because--this is--I never heard of the Mount, because the Sisters at the hospital knew about a lot of things but they really weren't aware of the Mount at all. So I don't think I ever heard about it--strange now. But the nuns would come to visit on their way--you know, recruiting and things--and they would tell my parents--they were both looking for a Catholic college for my sister and me. And they said, "Well, then St. Catherine's is the best college in the world, so you have to go there." And so we did. Took the train and it was two nights and a day traveling by train back there. And I made--I think made seventeen round trips over the years. And then of course, all my best friends were there. And so I spent a lot of my life in St. Paul, also.

[00:12:06.26] SHANNON GREEN: What do you remember about St. Catherine's--[unintelligible] happy memories?

[00:12:11.19] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Wonderful, wonderful college. I got a superb education. Very strong on liberal arts. So arts and music and literature--and I majored in English. I wanted to go to France, and I knew I probably wouldn't get there without some kind of a scholarship, so I majored in French too. And I did--I got a Fulbright Scholarship and went to France for a year after I graduated. So I had a wonderful education. And the Sisters at St. Paul were loving--the same kind of people. They took us into their lives and participated in ours. They were great girls--great women--and very well educated. So then that was our goal, to be very well educated too.

[00:13:02.28] [Director's comments].

[00:13:32.01] SHANNON GREEN: So you did--you went to France after you graduated?

[00:13:35.23] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I did. And I lived in France for a year--loved it. The University of Poitiers, which is a small medieval--one of the oldest universities in France. And I lived in this little medieval town, and made friends over there and traveled. You had with that Fulbright setup in those days, they were trying to spend American money over there, and make it useful. So they were educating us and they were also bringing people from Europe over to America for education. They gave you all the money you needed. So I traveled all over. So I really got to know Europe and all. And then--this is just a little incident thing--at the end of the year was the year that Queen Elizabeth [Elizabeth II of England, crowned June 2, 1953] was--had her coronation. So we all went over there--[laughs]--slept the whole night before the coronation on the streets while the college-age kids danced in the streets. It was a lot of fun. And we watched the coronation. They didn't have TV in those days, but we heard it on the radio. They had radio speakers strung up on all the trees and things. So that was a major event for all of us. And as she ages now, and--you know, they think she's going to retire at this point--and I think, "I got you started!" [laughs]. So, yeah, she was great.

[00:15:08.03] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: So then I came home, and by that time I was twenty three. And all this time I know I had the vocation but I couldn't admit it to myself. Because I loved being home, I loved my family, I loved what I was doing--I taught for one year after I came back from France, in the local high school. And I liked that, and everything was going fine. But it was there in my heart that I needed to be a Sister. And of course I was resisting, because you give up a lot. And I was young enough that I wanted to keep on having fun. But finally I thought, "No, I've got to--I've got to give this a try." So on September 14--no--well, a couple of days before I entered, another girl from Lewiston and I got on the train and went all

the way down to LA to enter the convent--because that's--there was no question I would enter any other community. I had gone to school to Franciscans for a while, and I really loved them and respected them and I wouldn't have entered them for anything because these were my people, you know, the CSJs. And I think they knew all the time--they were encouraging me as I grew up there in that circle. So on September 15, 1954, along with about thirty or forty--I think forty-two other girls, we entered the convent. And that was the old St. Mary's [Academy], that's over on Slauson--was over on Slauson and Crenshaw. And it was like going into the middle ages. Very shocking. And by this time I'm mourning what I left behind, and I'm not thinking of leaving but it was like a--oh, black and white experience--all of a sudden, I'm in another world. It's very interesting. And I was quite disoriented for about three or four months. And then--I didn't consider leaving, but I kept wondering, "What on earth am I doing here? And what will it be like all my life?" Then one day, in a conversation, it just slipped into place and it fit. And I thought, "Thank God, this is where I belong." And I've never doubted it since.

[00:17:40.11] SHANNON GREEN: Do you remember what it was about that conversation?

[00:17:43.12] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yes I do. In January, there was a little--well it wasn't little, but the formality was, we were temporary for that first six months--we hadn't received a habit for sure and not any--we weren't really received in the community--we were, I guess you'd call it probationers or something. And so in January you had an appointment with the Provincial, Mother Mary Rosaleen [Lynch?? (1900-1999)], and asked to become a member of the Sisters of St. Joseph. So it was like a formal "asking". And I went in to do it, and while I was in the office it just felt perfect. Isn't that interesting? But that was God working, you know. Anyway so I came out of the office--[laughs]--I thought, "Oh, I'm home--this is where I belong." And I've never doubted it since, and I've been so happy ever since.

[00:18:38.01] SHANNON GREEN: I'm so curious you had seen the world, you know.

[00:18:41.10] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yeah. And I'd been back a lot, too.

[00:18:44.14] SHANNON GREEN: Yeah, and probably not any--or very few of your fellow Sisters--would have had those experiences.

[00:18:51.11] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yes. And they are now my best friends. They're about twelve of us left and we get together whenever we can. It's just like they're my sisters--sister sisters. Well, I was twenty-four, and almost all of them were seventeen or eighteen, and came straight from high school. [laughs]. And you know, you don't know a lot when you're right out of high school. But I was in such a state myself that I don't think--I know I didn't go around bragging about being better educated. I had a BA from St. Catherine's, I spoke French--I had to teach them French in the novitiate, which was a disaster--no, it wasn't a disaster, it was just a funny part of my life. And I had traveled--I'd lived in Europe. And they--I was like an old lady for them until we got acquainted. But I had happy times with them, and we became best friends.

[00:19:52.17] SHANNON GREEN: So you're novitiate experience, since you weren't in school, was--must have been a little bit different. What were you--

[00:20:01.22] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: It wasn't--I took all the religion classes that we had. And then I ended up teaching some of the college classes that they had to take. I taught English 1A several times, then I taught that French class. Couple of times I did Independent Studies with some of the ones who had some college but hadn't finished. I remember we taught--I taught St. Augustine "The City of God [Against the Pagans]" [by Augustine of Hippo, 5th century AD]. No--not the "City of God"--his autobiography--I forget the name of it. We'd sit in a circle under a tree somewhere and have our little class. But it was strange because--it was very medieval in those days. This is way before Vatican II [Second Vatican Council (1962-1965)]. And so I didn't have permission to go up and use the college library, which was right above us, so I had to teach out of my head. It wasn't really a good thing. I'm sorry they got that level of education. But then as soon as we made vows and went out and started doing our ministry, and they continued studying those summers and things, they were starting to get much better classes. So I didn't ruin anybody. [all laugh]. I did teach them French songs though. We still sing those sometimes, you know--lovely French carols and things. I figure I can do that--I can keep people happy teaching them songs.

[00:21:27.05] SHANNON GREEN: So was your first teaching as a Sister at Bishop Montgomery [High School, Torrance, California]?

[00:21:33.14] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yes. I made vows in March and then in September--or maybe August--we moved out to Redondo [Beach, California]. I lived in Redondo and Montgomery was just being built, you know--we opened--we had four Sisters. Three wonderful, superb nuns who were accomplished teachers--older--fun--so interesting--and me. And I was a "premie", you know. It was--I can't believe that, but they all thought I was pretty nice, and they thought, you know, "She needs to be taught how to teach." So out of their mentoring and their example, I learned so much about how to be a nun, how to live in community, how to teach. And they would make fun of me and laugh at me and then get me started again. So they were also very good friends. Sister Regina Clare [Salazar] is here. And she is still a very dear friend of mine. She was Directoress of the girl's side of the school. This was co-educational. No, there's another word for it. The classes were separate in separate buildings, but they were all one of a group, so that first class of '61--they're still good friends of mine.

[00:22:58.26] SHANNON GREEN: So at this point is teaching becoming part of your identity?

[00:23:05.01] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yes. It always had been. I'd always wanted to be a teacher, I knew that. My mother had been a teacher, my dad had been a teacher and a Principal, and the nuns all taught--so yeah, I knew that I would be a teacher. There was no question about that.

[00:23:20.14] SHANNON GREEN: At what point did you go to--oh, I see--then you came to the Mount.

[00:23:24.26] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yes. I was four years at Montgomery. And I was happy--I was having a good time teaching that level. I loved teaching high school. And then our "change list", as we called it, came out in I think August in those days. You didn't have much time to move and prepare. And all of a sudden, I had been changed to the Mount, which was a total shock to me. I knew--I sort of thought eventually I'll be a college teacher, but not yet, you know. I hadn't learned enough. But all of a sudden, I turn up at the Mount as the new English teacher. And then--that was '61. And then we had--I was at Chalon [campus] for one year--that was all we had right then. And then in--on November 6, 1961 we had the huge Bel Air Fire. And that was a major event for us, and major memories. I was involved in the residence life--I was the assistant and living over there in the residences. And we had to get three hundred kids off the hill--we had to evacuate totally. And you know, it was a new experience for everybody. I--the city wasn't really prepared for a major fire like this. And it started over in Beverly Hills--far east of us. It was a man that was working in his field and his plow struck a spark. And that's what started the fire--so interesting. And it was like a devil wind. It was the most terrible--it was cold--terribly windy--awful--and so the fire just went. And a lot of my memories came back with this terrible fire in Santa Rosa [October 2017]. So it kept moving our way. And we thought it'll stop at the [San Diego] freeway. And it didn't--it just flew right over. And all of a sudden, it's on our side. And we're trying to get people off the hill. And so a lot of the--several of the student officers and I worked together, and I just made sure that all the kids got out of the dorm, because the Sister in charge of the residence was away for a day at a meeting. And when she left, she said, "Now remember this needs to be done today". And I said, "Yeah, what else." And we were talking when she left. And I--if--she said to me, "Mary, if anything happens just send up a flare." [laughs]. And the next day, after we had burned over and we were out cleaning up and sweeping up broken glass--it was a terrible thing--she drove up. She had flown back from Oakland. And I said, "I didn't send up a flare--I didn't do it." And we started almost laughing about it. Anyway, I was one of the last off the hill. I think was one of about two or three that were still on the hill--and it was actually burning. And I didn't realize it, you know--I was inside working with the kids and doing things, and just making sure that everything was done. And finally someone said, "Mary, you'd better get out of here--it's burning". And so I went to my room. I got a black shawl, because that would hold my veil down, blowing in the wind--you know, what you think about. And I took a paperback that I had to teach the next day--"Lord Jim"--put it in my pocket so I'd have something to do off the hill. And I ran out the back door--the back of Brady that opens out towards the Chapel. And there was a line of eucalyptus trees that bordered all the way up the road that led to the top of the parking lot where the convent is now. And every tree was burning like a torch, from the top to the ground--so it was this line of burning torches. [laughs]. But there was a car there--I was able to drive. I jumped into the car and had another person with me, and we drove off the hill--and it was burning on both sides. And I was praying out loud--[unintelligible]--you know, it was traumatic. But by the end of the day the fire had passed over and

was heading down toward Malibu--Mandeville Canyon, and then Malibu. And--I just lost it--what was I going to say--oh I know. They loaded one car up with Sisters. They wanted to make sure that there were Sisters--that the media could say that the nuns are back--and that would help with looting and things. So I got stuck into that car. So we drove back up the hill--looked at houses that had burned out--between houses there were still standing--it was totally burned over. And we got up to the college, saw that the convent had burned to the ground, and the Arts building--not our most recent building--it had burned to the ground. And then a lot was scorched and windows broken everywhere. So we spent the night. And then the President was in the car. And she said, "All right, we're having classes. Let the press tell everybody that Mount St. Mary's is holding classes today." So I had an eight o'clock class--in I think it was room--well it room four something--it was 102 maybe--it was the classroom which has now become the Registrar's office in the Administration building. And I went into the room with the few kids that were around, that came to my class, and all the windows were broken out, and so all the glass was on the desks, and my teaching desk, and the floor. And we all took paper towels I think and swept the glass off so we could use the desks and sit. And we sat there with that cold wind blowing in those broken windows and held the class. I don't know how I did it. But I had "Lord Jim" in my pocket, so--[laughs]--I could do that way.

[00:29:49.09] SHANNON GREEN: Remind us of who the President was at that time?

[00:29:51.17] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Sister [Mary] Rebecca [Doan (1910-1999)]. And she was new that year. So she had--everyone said, you know, "Well, you had your baptism of fire." But she was outstanding--she was very, very good. And we got started again--rebuilt.

[00:30:08.06] SHANNON GREEN: It--you said you were there for one year when this happened? You said you were at Chalon for one year. Did you go to Doheny?

[00:30:16.21] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Well let me back up though. There's one memory that I'd love to share. When I got there, the fire hadn't happened until November. So I had a couple of months there. And I was very, very young and very new, and inexperienced. But I loved those older Sisters. Many of the older nuns living there were Founders. They had moved up to the college when it was founded, and they were in their last years. But I was so fascinated, you know, being a journalist I guess. I wanted them to tell me about the Founding. So they told me a lot of stories which I used in my book. They just stayed in my memory. Now it escapes me--just a minute--I want to tell that story. Oh I know--I said, "What was it like when you first opened the college?", you know. And they said--the impression I got was that there were not very many nuns, and almost--I think maybe one lay teacher only. It was very small. And they said, well--one said, "Well, I was the Registrar. And I worked in the Registrar's office until about four", and that one would teach until about four--four o'clock they would leave their respective jobs--President, Registrar, everybody, came to the kitchen and helped the cook--cook dinner for the kids--the girls that were there, and also themselves. They cooked the dinner, they served it, and then they cleaned up, helped do the dishes--this is the President, the Registrar, everybody. And it was hot, and they were hot and tired. But then they said we would go out--when everything was cleaned up and done--we'd go out in front of Brady [Hall], which was the only building up there--and sit in the cool of the breeze, and rest, and look down into the valley, and we could smell orange blossoms. [smiles]. And I--that memory just stayed with me. And we would also--we would know if there was the car coming up to our hill, because you'd hear it rattling away coming down--I guess it would have been Bundy. And we'd think, "Oh, maybe that's a new student." [laughs]. So they'd be up there smelling orange blossoms and waiting for students to come. I thought, "That's a lovely memory." So I used that in the book.

[00:32:52.16] SHANNON GREEN: Who were some of those--the names of those Sisters?

[00:32:54.19] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: One was Sister Rose de Lima [Lynch (1896-1986)]. And she was part of it. She had a PhD from Berkeley, which was very unusual in those days. But she came with her PhD. Sister [Mary] Hortensia [Lynch (-1969)]--and I'm trying to remember what she taught--I think maybe she taught--I don't know, it may have been History. Anyway, I took an Independent Study with her when I was a novice. And she was in a "memoring" kind of stage, and she told me a lot of stories. Told me what it was like in the old days, and "what they're losing because they're changing and this has now gotten lost and they made a very bad decision here", and all of that. But I got to be good friends with her. Sister [Mary] Germaine [McNeil (1913-1999)] was one who came a little later. Sister Marie de Lourdes [Le May (1880-

1960), was one of the first Presidents, and she was still there. And I took a Creative Writing class from her. She and I became kind of good friends that year. Sister [Mary] Celestine [Quinn, (-1967)] was the Music teacher. And Sister [Mary] Ignatia [Cordis (1886-1986)] was the Art teacher. And they were a funny pair. And they knew they were funny, so they kind of built their reputation for being funny. And they lived down in that Arts building which burned. So most of the nuns, those older ones, lived in the convent which burned that day. So that turned the personality of the Mount around--those older ladies went off to various places to live in a more protected atmosphere and never came back, you know. Because they were retirement age. So I lost my buddies at that point. And a lot of them went to live in the hospital--at St. Mary's in Tucson (Arizona). So that kind of was the end of the era of the old Sisters who were the storytellers. But that was all right--new people came in--or some of the younger ones surfaced and they became the important ones. People like Sister [Mary] Laurentia [Digges (1910-1991)], Sister Mary Patricia [Sexton (1912-1986)], Sister Patricia Clare [Mullin (1908-2002)]--I'm naming my English teachers. And more and more, you know. So--.

[00:35:20.11] SHANNON GREEN: Did you ever meet [Rev.] Mother [Margaret Mary] Brady [(1866-1954)]?

[00:35:23.21] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: No. I don't remember when she died. I think she may have been living in Tucson at that point. I did not know her.

[00:35:33.18] SHANNON GREEN: Just as we're reflecting on those early leaders at the Mount--you know we talk about leadership a lot--

[00:35:40.24] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I know. The Mount, yep.

[00:35:43.18] SHANNON GREEN: So could you just share some of the characteristics of those Sisters--of their leadership--that you would maybe want our students to know about? How you would describe them as leaders?

[00:35:55.02] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Courageous. Frequently doing unbelievably good things with almost no money and no resources. So they were ingenious. And they would--they knew what to do, you know. They'd get acquainted with leaders in the city--the mayor, the different--some wealthy people--some Catholic leaders in town--and then get them to help them, so--. Frequently they'd have like a--[makes air quotes] "an army" of helpers. Didn't try to do it by themselves, but they could do things with almost no resources--that was one of them. They led as people, not as whatever the other word would be. They loved people--they loved the students, they loved each other, they loved being leaders, and they were--I think that's my main thing--it's relational. And you were at your best if you knew who you were leading, and if you were doing it together with them rather than imposing things on them. I certainly learned that about my own leadership. When I was making mistakes it's when I was trying to do it by myself. You know, you learn that afterwards. Trying to think if there was one--Sister [Mary] Dolorosa [Mannix (-1965)]. I don't think I named her name. She was brilliant nun. And by that time--by the time I knew her she was teaching us different things in the novitiate--I didn't ever know her up at the Mount. She apparently had gone somewhere else by that time. She was so brilliant in the classics. And she would sit in the corner of our novitiate and we'd all gather and be taught. And I forget what she was teaching. Maybe--it might have been Church History, something like that. And then she would forget that she was speaking--all of a sudden, she'd be teaching--speaking in Greek. And we'd look at each other--hm, that's interesting. And then she'd switch into Latin. [smiles] She was a brilliant lady, but by that time it was all sort of getting mixed up in her head. But she--we loved her. And of course, when we went to her class it was a storytelling class, which was fun. She'd tell us a lot of stories about the beginnings of the Mount and the Church and all. She was a great lady.

[00:38:35.14] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Then the next year, being the youngest and with the--what someone said to me--I have a strong back--we--I went down to Doheny [campus], and four of us--five of us--maybe six--were the ones that--we didn't found the Doheny program but we were the first teachers there. And we started awarding the Associate of Arts degree, which wasn't popular with everyone. I think it was Sister Rose de Lima [Lynch] who thought it was a terrible mistake for the Mount to offer a two year degree--very demeaning--made us like any other, you know, community college. So some of the big leaders really didn't like the idea of Doheny. And we were, for quite a while, not considered really part of the whole thing. We were part of it but not--the Chalon campus was then called "the main campus" and we were called "the downtown campus"--that was the first few years. And we sort of felt like we didn't have full stature. But

we did a really good job. We taught very well. Many of those Doheny graduates are very close to us still--one of them is very close to me. And you know she started out at Doheny. And Doheny also was considered in those days a place where if you were doing really well at Chalon, let's put her down in Doheny for a couple of semesters and see if she can do better. So you know, there was some "rehab" going on there. And we loved them. And if they needed help with their writing we helped them with their writing.

[00:40:22.26] SHANNON GREEN: Yeah. I often--I love hearing about those early days at Doheny--since that's the campus I spend the most time at. But, yeah, I'm curious just in terms of the neighborhood of LA, the context--you know, what were you seeing, and what were your students experiencing? If you could just dig a little bit deeper into that.

[00:40:42.08] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I haven't thought about that recently.

[00:40:44.05] SHANNON GREEN: What were the needs that you were responding to? It's the '60s, right?

[00:40:54.09] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I know it was the '60s, and lots of excitement culturally. I'm trying to remember what it was like down there. Listen to what I'm saying--"down there". That's the phraseology that I didn't like at the time, you know. Some of them--many of them were commuters, which was more rare here, because they had farther to go. But they could commute from home, which made a difference in our clientele, who came. The freeways were just being built up at that point, so there was a lot of activity around that part of town. But I really--I don't--I haven't thought about that enough to be able to give you a good description--

[00:41:40.20] SHANNON GREEN: So did you stay--

[00:41:42.27] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: --but we loved it. We loved it. And we built it into a kind of a personality of a campus that--was made them happy and made us happy. We started traditions and good things.

[00:41:58.15] SHANNON GREEN: Vatican II is happening at that time, as well. So how did you interact with that--with the teachings coming out, and how did that start to unfold?

[00:42:09.28] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: By that time I was gone. I was at Doheny for I think six years. And then the community had me go and--to Stanford, and be full time there for four years and get my PhD. So by the time the teachings of Vatican II were really making an impact, I was in another whole situation--which I loved. And a couple of things about that. The community went to extraordinary means to educate us in the new theology--to help us make the transition. I remember any number of wonderful workshops. And we spent money on that--the community did--to bring major speakers here, you know. I remember one workshop we had--probably was around 1970. It was during the summer because almost everyone was in school, you know, so they could come for long periods during the summer. And it was a two week workshop, and you just went to one place and stayed there for two weeks. I was up at the Chalon campus, so I got to go swimming every day. But they lined up probably five or six groups of either theologians or sociologists or historians or whatever--five or six major areas. And you'd have two or three in a group. So that's a lot of money going out to hire these people. And then they'd travel to the different sites. So everyone in the community was somewhere during those two weeks--anywhere like a number up in the San Francisco area, a number in Tucson--San Diego. And you would have your two day workshop with that person and then a little break, and then another group would come in and you'd change into another. So we got major education on the Church history, what the changes were--what changes were happening. And it helped us enormously. So I'm just really--when I think about that I'm so proud that we had--in the community had the courage to do it and to spend that money, you know, to get those real great experts in to help us.

[00:44:35.24] SHANNON GREEN: Do you remember what, for you personally, was exciting or life-changing, mind-altering?

[00:44:42.25] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: You know, I don't. I don't remember the actual subject matter. I just remember--fresh air. Lots of fresh air coming in. [smiles].

[00:44:54.03] SHANNON GREEN: So you felt you were ready--that this was--

[00:44:57.01] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: No! No--we were never ready. There was too much going on. And then always resistance to change--in the community as well as everywhere else. You know, it didn't solve all our problems. But it gave us jist to work with, you know. I want to talk about when I changed the habit, because that was a really important wake-up moment for me. By that time I'm at Stanford, and I think it was my--could have been my first year at Stanford--I think it would have been--in 1969--no I was a couple of years into it. I went--I was in full habit--and here's this nun in a black habit on the Stanford campus. And meanwhile they're burning buildings over in Berkeley and all this stuff is going on--very tumultuous years, and things happening. But I'd go tramping on campus and a few people--well, most people looked at me and I knew they didn't understand what I was--because, you know, how are you supposed to understand symbolism if you've never been around a Catholic? So I didn't know that at first--I didn't realize that people didn't click on who I was or what I was. And then--and I had never considered not wearing the habit--I loved wearing the habit. I was proud of it, and I was proud of being a Sister. So then all of a sudden, we get word from St. Louis [Missouri] that we can make the choice, and if you want to keep the habit that's fine, if you want to keep a veil that's fine, if you want to wear secular dress, that's fine. I think we kept the veil for a while. And instantly I thought, "That's what's wrong." I--the reason that people look at me and walk away is they don't know what I'm standing for. So that--that came out late fall, and at Christmas time most of us who were living there at that convent at the time in Palo Alto changed our habits. And I changed like that with no regret, because I knew it was going to make more of a difference--and people would relate to me more easily. And relationship is the whole thing, really. So I still love being a nun, but I don't have to dress like a traditional Sister.

[00:47:21.07] SHANNON GREEN: I'm just going to ask if you lived in community at that time or were there Sisters--

[00:47:24.06] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I did. There was a school in Palo Alto, and that's a group of some of my best friends that I lived with then. I think there were about six or seven of us who lived in community. Most of them taught at the school. And then I was a student--or study--I could walk over to the campus--it was close enough. And sometimes I'd bring my friends over and then, you know, get to know the Sisters. It was a very, very nice situation. But you know, life keeps going on. There are tough things and good things.

[00:48:01.29] SHANNON GREEN: What did you study? What was your focus in your graduate work?

[00:48:04.04] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: American Literature. So it was mostly the nineteenth century. And I worked with the [local colorist--regional literature expert??] when I finally did my dissertation. You know, I had good experience. I loved the teachers. Those were the days that Stanford was a little smaller--a lot smaller. Again, relational. I got to know several of the teachers and they'd invite me to their homes. You know, I think then see I was looking weary or something and say, "Come on home and have lunch at my house then you can go back." So it was that kind of feeling at Stanford. I don't know what it's like now. I'm still--I'm in touch and all that--but I'm not sure they have that same experience. But I find myself always coming back to "relational", because that's what's important.

[00:48:56.15] SHANNON GREEN: Then you came back to the Mount. So you probably--I assume it was intended that you would come back?

[00:49:02.23] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Oh yes. Yeah. And I would come back every summer for [unintelligible] and all. Yeah, I came--I got--I finished and I came home. The President at that time was Sister Cecilia Louise [Moore (1928-2004)], and my friend Sister Magdalen [Coughlin (1930-1994)] was--I think she was Dean at that point. The two of them drove up--we packed the car, and they drove me down. Again--you're with your friends. So that was good. And so almost right away I became head of the [English] department. I think the Sister that was the Chair of the English department couldn't wait until I got there because she didn't like being Chair I guess. So within a few months I was Chair of the English department. And that was sort of where I landed for a long time then--long time. And I loved teaching there.

[00:49:55.02] SHANNON GREEN: What were the students like at that time? So we're moving more into the seventies and--

[00:50:00.22] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Fun. And I have to tell you what I did yesterday. The class of 1975--they were like my kids. They lived--I was the floor nun. You know, so they--in those days there was a Sister living on every floor of the residence--the two residence halls. And I was on second Brady. And they were--I got to know them really well--a bunch of them, like maybe fifteen or twenty. And they were fun, loving. They'd come to you if they really wanted help, but mainly they were devils. They were so funny and they'd get me into situations that you couldn't believe. And all of a sudden,, you know, I'd--they were like my kids. And so life went on, and we stayed friends long after graduation. And most of them I taught in school too, so I taught them how to write and all this stuff. Finally I was leaving--I retired years later. And I was going to leave and move up to Pasco. And they came to me and they said, "You told us that you would start a book club, and you never did." And I said, "Well, let's get it organized right now." So we have a book club that's been running since 2003--no before that--we started before I left. So it's about twenty years old. And we had our meeting yesterday. So we drove out to Arcadia and--we always meet in someone's home. And discussed this book that I hadn't gotten around to reading, but I listened to them discuss it. And it's become a great social thing. But it's like your family meets once in a while. And it's because of the Mount. They grew to be best friends among themselves, and I happened to be in the middle of it, so I was like--I don't know what--not their mother, exactly--but in a sense, yeah, you know. I came--became tangled up with all of their families, went to the funerals, went to the weddings.

[00:52:07.22] KELBY THWAITES: So we've heard some stories from some other Sisters who have been floor nuns--

[00:52:14.11] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Who have been what?

[00:52:16.05] KELBY THWAITES: [laughs]. Who have been on the floor--

[00:52:18.03] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Really?

[00:52:18.09] KELBY THWAITES: Yeah, with the students. Can you just take a moment to think about--because you're not the first one to say that they were little devils. [all laugh].

[00:52:27.15] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Oh they were so much fun.

[00:52:29.22] KELBY THWAITES: Can you think of one or two just brief stories or situations that you came across that might--that you might be willing to share just to bring humor or--whatever happened. It could be poignant or it could be humorous or it could have been people getting into mischief, but they, you know, have since probably reformed [all laugh]. But I'm thinking--

[00:52:52.17] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: No, they haven't reformed. [all laugh].

[00:52:55.03] KELBY THWAITES: Or they haven't reformed--

[00:52:56.08] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: And their raising their grandchildren at this point [laughs].

[00:52:58.18] [Director's comments.]

[00:53:19.25] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: So there I was living in the room on the--second Brady. And I'm a heavy sleeper, so I don't hear--I wasn't a very useful floor nun because if something went wrong it wouldn't have woken me up, and you know, it should have. But I'm sleeping away, and then I become aware that there's activity in the hall--you know, people quietly moving around. Obviously they were trying to be quiet, but--then it was a little bit more of a, you know. And finally I thought, "Oh God, I 'd better get up." So I got up, put on my bathrobe, opened the door, and there was nothing on the hallway, except I looked down that way [points] and Judy Fitzpatrick, who was one of the worst of all--so funny--and she was just disappearing into her room looking back and closed the door trying to disappear. But I happened to see her. And I went over and I said, "Judy, what are you doing?"--[unintelligible]--you know, being the nun. And then I realized--I forget how the whole story unfolded--they had gotten bored, and they needed to do something during the night. So they took all their furniture--beds, desks, chairs--at least that much--moved them out of their

rooms into the hallway and set up a whole system of bedrooms and desks in the hallway. I didn't even wake up. And they'd tip-tap--tip-top--whatever that word is--then--you have to stop--what's the word I'm looking for?

[00:55:02.04] KELBY THWAITS: Tip-toe.

[00:55:02.28] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Thank you very much! Okay. They would tip-toe past my door, carrying heavy stuff--chairs--easy chairs--things that they had acquired in their rooms--and I never heard it. And then they all started laughing--they all came out of their rooms. And I was scolding Judy, because she had been out of her room in the middle of the night. And we all cracked up. And then the next--and then I said, "We'd better go to bed, because you guys need to sleep before morning." And so everyone calmed down finally. But they had moved the entire dorm into the hallway. Now other things that happened--those were the days of "panty raids". And it was certain fraternities over at Loyola [University]. Marymount. It wasn't Marymount in those days--it was just Loyola--and all their boyfriends were in the different fraternities. And so then you'd have all these things going on. And I would hear--I'd hear the panty raid going on for sure and the girls yelling. And they were laying traps for the kids, because they'd hear that it was going to happen that night. So one girl broke her leg as she was running past into the bathroom to get some more water to douse on one of the guys or something. They had so much fun. College life was a little different in those days, but they were great girls.

[00:56:37.13] [Director's comments].

[00:56:46.17] SHANNON GREEN: What about a story of a student that you're particularly proud of, or maybe transformed educationally?

[00:56:56.11] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Well, I'm so proud of so many of them. A lot--they'll tell me--they'll write out of nowhere--I'll get an email and I would have thought, "Oh gosh, when did I teach her"--must have been about '82--but she'd say what a difference it had made that I had been her teacher. And I couldn't even figure out what it was. But I know that--I once figured out that teaching writing--if you are successful--and you can help a student pull her thoughts together, put them in their arrangement and then write a good essay--you're teaching them a lot more than just how to get it down or how to do it on a computer. It gives them a sense of self-worth. If I can express myself, and if I can figure something out, put the thoughts together, build an argument, write it, and convince, then I'm something--I'm something better than I thought I was. So it's a way of almost unconsciously building self-worth. And that's one of the things that I am most happy that I was able to accomplish. I loved it. And then a lot of them become your good friends, because you reveal a lot when you can't write--and you reveal a lot--then all of a sudden, it's your family. And there have been a few that--whose families didn't give them the kind of support that I got when I was growing up, and that I would like anyone to have had. And you--then you kind of fit into a place there, and you give them that support that they need. But as I was thinking about having this interview I thought, almost everything I talk about ends up being the value of relationships. And that's--that was an insight for me.

[00:58:59.27] SHANNON GREEN: Why did you decide to--what made you decide to go to Europe and do a sabbatical--[unintelligible]? What prompted that?

[00:59:09.15] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Well, I got know Europe really well that year I was over there with the Fulbright. And then at the end of that year my mother and sister arrived and then we had an American Express tour all over. So what I hadn't gone to as a student I went with my mother and my sister. And I love Europe. Especially I love England and France. Love them. So then I--after I was teaching at the Mount long enough to kind of have my self put together, I started leading tours of students. So I would--we had--I think was it interterm--that one month quarter thing that--in January. So during interterm I would put together a trip--about every other year. And once--usually it was touring England, because I knew it best by that time. But then I also--I guess I had two different sabbaticals when I would go over and live for about a few months. My major sabbatical that I had somewhere in the '80s, I lived at--in Oxford for about nine months--most of a year. And I would travel out of there, but I also was reading, you know, in one of the departments in Oxford and getting to know people. I lived in a really--convent full of really interesting, wonderful people and had a good base there. So you know, any chance I got I'd go over and live there for a while. And I

always loved going back to Paris. I don't know--now with so much violence over there, I'm not sure how I'd--I know I'm not going to get back, because you'd have to carry me at this point. But I don't think I would enjoy it as much. But it's a fabulous city. So I went over whenever I could.

[01:01:22.14] SHANNON GREEN: And also then opened the world of travel to students, it sounds like.

[01:01:26.22] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Exactly--and culture, you know. I would--I was on to architecture, and I'd tell them what I knew about that. And I'd give them little lectures on the bus, as we were traveling. Some of the drivers were fabulous--men and women--mostly men. So, yeah, they'd learn a lot. But we'd also have a lot of fun, because I knew some of the edges that you could entertain with. Yeah.

[01:01:54.29] SHANNON GREEN: Could you also talk a little bit then during the years after Vatican II about renewal and going back to the roots of the congregation? Were you involved or engaged with any of the--kind of reclaiming the charism and the history, or how that might have impacted you?

[01:02:17.20] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Well it certainly impacted me. I don't think I was involved in any of the--certainly not the scholarship. But everyone did a lot of reading and got a lot of help talking to visiting lecturers and things. My community was outstanding keeping us up to date and giving us opportunities. Yeah--my concept of Church really transformed. And then a couple of recent popes have made all the difference to me--John Paul--no not John Paul--John XXIII [Pope Saint John Paul XXIII, born Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (1881-1963), Pope 1958-1963], responsible for Vatican II council--is one of my heroes. Look at the daring of that man. He was a fabulous person. And then of course Pope Francis [born Jorge Mario Bergoglio (1936-), Pope (2013-)] is another hero of mine. But it's courage--both of them, by the way, are very relational, if you notice. It's because the Church is about people. Christ was a person. So I don't know exactly what to pin down to give you in response to that question.

[01:03:31.25] SHANNON GREEN: Maybe more in terms of the charism and history of the Sisters specifically. Where do you start to--is that with you all along--are you aware of the history in France, or does that kind of come--

[01:03:45.06] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yeah. We had classes when we entered, in History. One of the--another one, Sister St. Francis [Sheerin] was one of the early Sisters. And she would come and teach us Church--not Church, History of the Congregation. And so I learned a lot of that--we all did. But then later on we began to fit it together with what happened to our Sisters. And that's--that was after Vatican II. All the communities were encouraged to do research and then to spread it, you know. So we learned about the first six Sisters, and the kitchen, and the fact that if you can teach them to do lace then you can get some of those girls off the streets and into a respectable profession, and you can change their lives that way. That kind of thing just impressed me so deeply. And it's what you do in education, always.

[01:04:48.27] SHANNON GREEN: So have you been to Le Puy [France], and--

[01:04:50.22] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yes. Yeah, I went to Le Puy and also to Lyon [France], those two wonderful places. Yeah.

[01:04:58.15] SHANNON GREEN: Where do you see the charism going in the future? Do you have any anxiety about that?

[01:05:09.05] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I think it's in the people that we have made contact with. I--people say, "Aren't you worried about the future of the Sisters of St. Joseph and the future", and I'm not. We're in God's hands, and God knows what he or she is doing. And some--all of us carry that into the future. As we have fewer Sisters, things like that wonderful CSJ Institute--that's--I was trying to come up with the word--that's a wonderful example of our future. It's something that's holding the charism and the history alive, continuing to spread it, teach it, share it. I see it happening in--where I live now is in a convent across the street from the hospital that we founded a hundred and one years ago, which is now no longer funded by us. But we're there for presence and ministry. I just lost it. Where was I going with that. [laughs].

[01:06:23.13] [Director's comments].

[01:06:36.16] SHANNON GREEN: So you were saying, Pasco, you live across the street--

[01:06:41.09] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Oh. And there I see the charism carried in a very impressive way. It's because the people that put together the spirit of that hospital really were imbued with the charism and our sense of mission. And the Sister that I live with, Sister Ester [??], is now Vice President for Mission. And she helps them with the language of mission. It's very interesting. And you have people there who have been there a long time and some just recently arrived who really know how to talk about the mission of Jesus at the Lourdes Hospital. I am so impressed. That's the future. And in that fairly small town--it's good sized now but it's still--it's a rural community--lot of farming around and all. They know what our hospital is about. I started to say "college"--that's the old girl. But they know that when they come there they'll be treated with respect as a valued person. And that doesn't always happen at every place--we know that--school or hospital or anywhere. So I'm proud. Every time I go to an area where the Sisters are or have been you know somehow people have caught the spirit. So that's our future. And if we get more vocations--and we're getting some--a few--they're wonderful people, and there'll be a way that they'll carry it on.

[01:08:31.25] [Director's comments.]

[01:08:37.05] SHANNON GREEN: Is there anything else from your time at the Mount that you want to share--any other stories or things you're proud of, ways you saw the Mount change and grow?

[01:08:46.28] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Oh yeah. I grew up with the Mount too, so that's a different kind of thing. I'm trying to think what else I could share with you. The Alumni Association has always been very helpful--very reaching out to us. I wasn't an "alum" but I'm everything else, you know, connected with the college except that. I love the way it's going. I'm very proud of the leadership now in the college. Both Jackie Doud [Jacqueline Powers Doud, former MSMU President] and Anne [Anne McElaney-Johnson, current MSMU President] have been outstanding leaders and made the--what I think must have been a fairly easy transition from having a nun at the helm, you know. And we've had some wonderful CSJ leaders. But I'm so happy with the way it's going now--very comfortable with our future. And what you're doing, in this [CSJ] Institute--that's exciting.

[01:09:47.29] SHANNON GREEN: What about--you took some time in leadership as well.

[01:09:51.16] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yes. Well, I'm in the community I've been--in the '80s I was Regional Superior and Provincial Councilor. So that was a six year term during which time I left the college--I was on the Board of Trustees--

[01:10:10.25] [Director's comments].

[01:10:40.25] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Yeah, so I--and I was on the Board of Trustees of the Mount at that point. And then I--I had a sabbatical--that's when I went to Oxford. And then I came back and in 19--well I guess that's before--well, whatever--1974-78 I was Academic Dean. And then I guess that's when I had my sabbatical. And I came back and was head of the department [English] again--and--with a wonderful group on the--in the department--that was good times. And then later in the--I think it was in the year 2000 maybe, Jackie Doud was Provost at the time, and she really needed a sabbatical--wanted a sabbatical. And finally talked me into being acting Provost, which I didn't feel comfortable with, but I finally said, well, Jackie needs her sabbatical. Well I was acting Provost--well I was Provost for that year. And during the year she was elected--appointed President. So that stuck me for a little longer. So I was Provost for about either three or four years--I'd have to sit down and count it. And then finally by that time I was well ready for retirement--by age and I was tired too. So I left the college in 2003. And that's when my wonderful Provincial said to me, "Mary, what do you want to do now?" And I thought a while and I said, "I think I'd like to go home"--meaning back to Pasco--back to the Northwest, which is always my home place anyhow. And so I came to live with the Sisters at the hospital. And that's when I wrote a book and I did some working at the local Catholic high school--did some things there. And that's where I've been ever since. So I've been in leadership several times--twice. And then one of the things I did while I was retired up in Pasco was become a Regional again--so for another six years I was a Regional there. So, you know, you just keep going.

[01:13:03.00] SHANNON GREEN: What do you feel you were able to offer your community through your leadership?

[01:13:10.10] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I was good at innovation. A number of things that we do now were originally things that I put together. The "Designs" [magazine], for instance. I don't think many people know that but we formed a committee early on. We needed better public--well, not public relations--we needed a better way of talking to each other. In those days it wasn't computerized, you know. So we got that going--named it--I think I named it "Designs". Someone had told me, "What do you mean by that?" And whatever I figured out it worked. So there were things like that, that I could see happening that I could help put together--organizational. And then you--relationships. You learn to know people in a much deeper way. And it was fun at this province Assembly the last two days. There were people that I had worked with on a really close level and become really good friends--not talking about it but just knowing that we knew things about each other that were very important to us. So I think so. And then my ability to write. That's always a contribution that you can make.

[01:14:39.07] SHANNON GREEN: Yeah. Tell us a little bit about the process of writing "All Things New".

[01:14:42.14] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Oh. I loved it. People kept saying, "Mary, you'd better write a book." And I'd say, "Oh no, I couldn't ever do that." Sister Mary Sevilla is the one that I have to give the final credit to, because she would not let me forget it. So finally, I thought, "Well, maybe I could." And then I was able to use our wonderful archives here--worked with Sister Patricia Rose [Shanahan]. And I would end up coming down here about every six or eight weeks and stay here for about a week, do the research, talk to people--did a little traveling--I made the trip over to Tucson and tried to put that experience together. And then I'd go home and write. And then I'd get that put together, then go back for more. Because so much of it I wanted to be able to say--photograph this--I need to take this home, you know. And I put together a committee, which was very important. Because I knew--I needed some place to share what I was writing, and so I chose outstanding people. I chose Sister Thomas Bernard [MacConnell (1926-)], who was also a college writing teacher, but wonderful historian. She'd been in congregational leadership and had done the archives there. I chose her and [Sister] Mary Murphy--who was the one who is really a leadership in researching the history. Oh, don't put this on the thing--I can't think of the third person--it's very important. Well Sister Patricia Rose [Shanahan]--isn't this bad? Okay, don't use this because I left out one of the important Sisters and right now I can't think of it. But I had a committee, and we met every time that I would come. And I would be prepared and I would have sent them copies of the chapters I had written, and they would have read them and then they critiqued them. So we sat around that table and really talked it through. So that was extremely helpful. I don't think I could have done well without someone from outside. And then my brother, who was--who had published three books in his retirement before he died last year--he read it all the way through and critiqued it. Mostly he told me he liked it, but--he had very good suggestions. So that was a very important thing to do, to get outside readers. Then one of the other people--persons that I had read it was Bishop [Carlos Arthur] Sevilla [SJ (1935-)]--who was Bishop of Yakima [Washington] at the time. And I had talked to him once at a retreat. And he said what's going on? And I told him that I couldn't get started on this history. So he gave me some sage advice, including get a committee--get someone to nag you, you know. So by the time I started, I started sending him chapters. So he did that for me.

[01:18:00.15] SHANNON GREEN: Would you just tell--for the sake of the cameras--a little bit about what the book is about and why you chose the title?

[01:18:08.16] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Okay. I forget why I chose the title. [laughs].

[01:18:13.27] SHANNON GREEN: That's okay. Just say the title at some point for us.

[01:18:16.15] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: The book relates--tells the story of our Province--coming from St. Louis [Missouri] to answer a need in the West. And we were the youngest Province. And we had been established in America since 1846 I think--

[01:18:44.17] SHANNON GREEN: --'36--1836 in Carondelet?

[01:18:47.26] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Thank you. Okay. Thank you.

[01:18:49.08] [Director's comments].

[01:19:11.25] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: During my retirement, I decided I'd better do something. So I decided I would write the history of our Province [Book "All Things New" (2014)]--from 1870 when they came to Los Angeles--and--you know, I'm--I have to stop for a minute. I've got those things all mixed up with Le Puy and everything else.

[01:19:40.15] SHANNON GREEN: You're right. It's 1936 to Carondelet, and then 1870 is the Trek ["Trek of the Seven Sisters" from St. Louis, Missouri to Tucson, Arizona].

[01:19:51.01] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I'm trying to remember if there was a call from a bishop that set us going to the Trek--

[01:19:57.17] SHANNON GREEN: Yes. Salpointe--Bishop Salpointe [Bishop Jean-Baptiste Salpointe (1825--1898), Bishop of Arizona]--

[01:20:00.15] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Thank you.

[01:20:00.23] SHANNON GREEN: In 1868--

[01:20:01.24] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: You ought to be in this chair, honey. [all laugh].

[01:20:03.00] SHANNON GREEN: Yeah, but we want you to tell it.

[01:20:04.15] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Okay. At the request of a Bishop in Tucson--I know what, he needed teachers for the deaf I believe--

[01:20:14.03] SHANNON GREEN: --for Indian children--

[01:20:15.03] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: --and the Indians. Okay. So our Reverend Mother said, "I think we can put some Sisters into this project". So they selected six nuns--six Sisters to come to the West. And they left in--I don't know if it was--they left in 1870. And the first thing they did was go up to Omaha [Nebraska], I think it was, and got on one of the first--that's the second year of the--gosh I'm--I haven't thought through this for a while.

[01:20:55.29] SHANNON GREEN: That's okay.

[01:20:57.13] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Wait a minute. It's so interesting. That's the part that bothers me. Uh--Transcontinental Railroad. That opened up the year before we came. So our Sisters went to Omaha after saying goodbye to everyone, took the train to San Francisco [California]. That's where Sister Thomas Bernard [MacConnell (1926--)] was so useful because she grew up in Oakland [California], and she told me, "No, the train wouldn't have stopped in Oakland--it would have stopped--blah blah--or somewhere else." We'd have to fight that one through. Okay, so we came to Oakland. Then they had a time to rest in--at a Mercy convent in San Francisco. Then they took a boat down to San Diego [California]. And the plan was to meet Bishop Salpointe there, who was the one that wanted us to come to Tucson, and I think communication got lost at that point and he wasn't there. He didn't--whatever--he didn't know that that was the date that they were going to try to meet him. So they got to San Diego and there was no way to get on to Tucson, so they had to make it up themselves--which to me is a real example of a CSJ spirit. "Oh, there's no Bishop to take us. Hm--what shall we do?" And so they rented--I guess you rented in those days or leased--a covered wagon and a driver. And they set out across the great American desert--full habits--all these nuns in black habits--they were wool, and hot, and they're going across the desert. But that's the famous Trek that Sister Mary Murphy is always involved in [recreations]--which is wonderful. She and I did that Trek together, but we did it in a Toyota, which is a little different--with the air conditioning. [laughs]. So then the Sisters finally arrived in Tucson. And they had been traveling for a couple of months I think until they finally got to Tucson. And then discovered that what was really needed was a school--and but also a

hospital. And so very soon they're running St. Mary's Hospital there in Tucson. All right, so the story starts there, and what I did was trace the development of the Los Angeles Province, all the way up to now, which turned about to be about twelve or thirteen chapters. And it was a joy to write. But I was able to talk about what we did in the different Indian missions--the hospitals that we started--and then--wonderful missions. But then we got to the point where we needed to move out toward California. And we got to California. But we had started a Province there in Tucson. But it didn't work well--we didn't have the right place and people and everything. So they changed--they decided to re-establish the Province at St. Mary's Academy in LA. I'm running down aren't I?

[01:24:22.29] SHANNON GREEN: A little bit. That's okay. We're getting to the end. But would you say the name of the book?

[01:24:26.26] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Oh. So the book is named "All Things New". And I thought that meant, those nuns, from the moment they set--put their feet on that train--everything was new to them. And their journals and their letters are fabulously interesting. But it was--everything was new. They got to the ocean, and that's new to them--and this boat that takes them down to San Diego--and then a covered wagon. So everything was new and they had to adapt to it. But I tried to turn it around in the Preface, that we're now also going into everything is new--our world is changed--we have changed--what we do has changed, because of so many things, for so many reasons. But we're living still in a world that's "all things new". That was kind of my idea of naming it.

[01:25:24.19] SHANNON GREEN: Is there anything you reflected on that you wanted to share that we haven't asked you about?

[01:25:30.21] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: I think I've pretty much covered it. Yeah.

[01:25:34.04] SHANNON GREEN: One last question. What's been your greatest joy in religious life?

[01:25:37.25] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: Being a CSJ. I love being a Sister. And I love being among my Sisters. The--again, the last couple of days, and during Province Assembly, you'd look around that room and see all the gifted people--all ages, all the different kinds of experience--but unified by that love and that drive toward the mission. I can't imagine a nicer way to spend my life. Truly.

[01:26:15.05] [Director's comments].

[01:26:46.29] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: [Looking at photos]. This is my first home visit with my mother, and it's a good picture of her and it's a good picture of me.

[01:26:54.17] SHANNON GREEN: That's lovely.

[01:26:55.10] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: This is one--well, my two nieces went to the Mount. And they came at some point for a reunion. And so I like that picture.

[01:27:03.24] SHANNON GREEN: That's great.

[01:27:06.14] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: And this one is with Jackie Doud and her husband and Marcos [McPeck] Villatoro [American writer]. Yeah. I love that picture.

[01:27:17.14] SHANNON GREEN: Wow. That's great.

[01:27:20.29] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: And this was taken at one of those CSJ celebrations, not too many years ago--probably early 2000s. But a lot of those Sisters are gone to God now. But I like that picture. And then these are two professional pictures--

[01:27:39.11] SHANNON GREEN: Oh good, for your Jubilees or the--

[01:27:41.14] SISTER MARY WILLIAMS: --that was Penny's, and this is--I think that was my fiftieth Jubilee.

It was taken here.

[01:27:47.27] [Director's comments].

[01:28:04.08] End of interview.

Interview Index

Interview Date: 10/23/2017

Interviewee: Sister Mary Williams

Interviewer: Shannon Green, Director, CSJ Institute, Mount Saint Mary's University; Sean Gary, Kelby Thwaits, Instructor, Film and Television, Mount Saint Mary's University.

Location: Carondelet Center, Los Angeles, California.

Transcription Date: 12/18/2017

Transcribed By: Nancy Steinmann

[00:00:00.00] [Director's comments]

[00:00:22.07] Date, location participants.

[00:00:36.02] Full name and age: Sister Mary Williams, age 87.

[00:00:54.16] Early life and family. Born Pasco, Washington, 1930. Father publisher of newspaper. Three children. Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital, sponsored by CSJs. Early contact with CSJ Sisters. Early vocation.

[00:03:06.03] Living during the Great Depression [1929-1939]. World War II. Story of secret Manhattan (Hanford) project to develop atomic bomb in Pasco during WWII.

[00:04:38.02] Early Sisters at hospital. Mother Mildred [??], Superior.

[00:05:04.21] CSJ history in Pasco, WA. Sister Mary Williams book, "All Things New" (2014). Early three-bed hospital in Pasco. Six Sisters in Lewiston, ID coming to Pasco in 1916 to start new hospital.

[00:08:01.11] Political issues during childhood. Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882-1945) [US President 1933-1945]. Democratic party. Anna Roosevelt [Anna Eleanor Roosevelt Dall Boettiger Halsted (1906-1975), child of Franklin Roosevelt, American newspaper editor and author] coming to dinner.

[00:09:21.23] Early religious experience. Growing up in minority Catholic area. Siblings careers.

[00:10:51.09] Early education and vocation. Attending College of St. Catherine, St. Paul, Minnesota. Memories of St. Catherine's. Earning BA in English and French. Winning Fulbright Scholarship to go to France. Sisters at St. Paul.

[00:13:03.06] [Director's comments]

[00:13:31.15] Living one year in France at University of Poitiers. Traveling around Europe. Attending coronation of Queen Elizabeth II of England [June 2, 1953].

[00:15:08.17] Returning to US. Teaching high school in Pasco, Washington. Moving to Los Angeles, California to enter CSJ convent 09/15/1954. St. Mary's Academy on Slauson and Crenshaw.

[00:16:49.05] Entering religious life age 24. Culture shock. Conversation with Mother Mary Rosaleen [Lynch?? (1900-1999)], Provincial. Memories of entry group of Sisters.

[00:19:51.15] Novitiate experience. Teaching English and French to novices. Not having permission to use college library.

[00:21:27.25] Early missions. Teaching 4 years at newly opened Bishop Montgomery High School, Torrance, California. Living in Redondo Beach. Sisters in community: Sister Regina Clare [Salazar], director of girl's side of school. Love of teaching.

[00:23:19.08] Mission teaching English at Mount (1961) for 1 year. Memories of Bel Air Fire (1961). Evacuating college. Sisters returning to school next day. Teaching in burnt building. Sister Mary Rebecca

[Doan (1910-1999)], college President.

[00:30:07.21] Memories of Sisters at Mount. Founding Sisters telling stories of founding, later used in book. Stories about opening Mount--faculty working and teaching, cooking, serving, cleaning. Smelling orange blossoms.

[00:32:51.04] Early Sisters at Mount. Sister Rose de Lima [Lynch (1896-1986)]. Sister Mary Hortensia [Lynch (-1969)]. Sister Mary Germaine [McNeil (1913-1999)]. Sister Marie de Lourdes [Le May (1880-1960), first MSMU President, Creative Writing faculty]. Sister Mary Celestine [Quinn, (-1967)], Music faculty. Sister Mary Ignatia [Cordis (1886-1986)], Art faculty. Older Sisters moving from college after Bel Air Fire to St. Mary's Hospital, Tucson, Arizona.

[00:35:01.02] Next Sisters at Mount. Sister Mary Laurentia [Digges (1910-1991)]. Sister Mary Patricia [Sexton (1912-1986)]. Sister Patricia Clare [Mullin (1908-2002)]. Rev. Mother Margaret Mary Brady (1866-1954).

[00:35:33.16] Leadership characteristics of early leaders at Mount. Courageous. Creative working without resources. Leading as people. Loving everyone. Sister Mary Dolorosa [Mannix (-1965)] teaching in Greek and Latin and telling stories of early Mount.

[00:38:34.22] Teaching at newly opened Doheny campus. Associate of Arts (2 year) degree program. Attitudes toward Doheny campus compared to Chalon campus.

[00:40:30.20] Needs of community near Doheny campus in 1960s. Commuter students.

[00:41:58.12] Vatican II. Attending Stanford University for PhD in American Literature. Community education in new theology and Church history.

[00:44:35.27] Experiences of Vatican II changes. Changing the habit while at Stanford 1969--changing relationship with non-Catholics.

[00:47:20.02] Experiences at Stanford University. "Relational".

[00:48:55.04] Returning to the Mount as English Department Chair. Sister Cecilia Louise [Moore (1928-2004)], MSMU President. Sister Magdalen [Coughlin (1930-1994)].

[00:49:54.25] Students at the Mount in 1970s. Working as floor nun for class of 1975 and starting book club.

[00:52:07.00] Stories of students while working as floor nun. Story about Judy Fitzpatrick and other students moving dormitory furniture into hallway at night. Panty raids by Loyola Marymount students.

[00:56:36.17] Pride in students. Teaching writing as teaching sense of self-worth. Supporting students. Value of relationships.

[00:58:58.25] Leading student tours to Europe. Sabbaticals in Europe. Living in Oxford, England for 9 months. Visiting Paris, France. Teaching culture, architecture.

[01:01:57.05] Vatican II--returning to roots, history, charism of CSJs. Pope Saint John Paul XXIII [born Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli (1881-1963), Pope 1958-1963, responsible for Vatican II council]. Pope Francis [born Jorge Mario Bergoglio (1936-), Pope (2013-)]. "Relational" attitude of Popes. Sister St. Francis [Sheerin], MSMU History faculty, teaching CSJ history. CSJ founding Sisters and early life in order. Visiting Le Puy and Lyon, France.

[01:05:00.17] History of CSJ charism. CSJ Institute at MSMU.

[01:06:23.05] [Director's comments].

[01:06:41.04] Currently living in Pasco, Washington. CSJ charism in Pasco. Sister Ester [??], Vice President for Mission. Legacy of Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital.

[01:08:37.07] Other memories of Mount. Alumnae Association. Jacqueline Powers Doud, former MSMU President. Anne McElaney-Johnson, current MSMU President. CSJ Institute.

[01:09:47.14] Working in CSJ leadership. Regional Superior and Provincial Councilor for 6 years in 1980s. Serving on MSMU Board of Trustees.

[01:10:11.08] [Director's comments].

[01:10:41.24] Working as Academic Dean at Mount 1974-1978. Working as English Department chair. Working as Acting Provost at MSMU 3-4 years starting in 2000. Retiring in 2003, returning to Pasco, Washington. Writing her book. Working as Regional Superior 6 years in Pasco.

[01:13:04.12] Reflections on community leadership. Innovation. Starting Designs magazine. Relationships. Current Province Assembly. Ability to write.

[01:14:39.18] Writing her book "All Things New" (2014). Sister Mary Sevilla. Working with Sister Patricia Rose Shanahan in CSJ Archives. Creating committee for reviewing book: Sister Thomas Bernard [MacConnell (1926-)]; Sister Mary Murphy; Sister Patricia Rose Shanahan, one other Sister, her birth brother. Getting advice from Bishop Carlos Arthur Sevilla SJ (1935-) [currently Bishop Emeritus of Yakima, Washington].

[01:18:00.21] Description of book "All Things New" (2014). History of CSJs in Los Angeles province.

[01:18:45.00] [Director's comments].

[01:19:12.27] [Retake] Writing book "All Things New" (2014). History of CSJs in Los Angeles province. Sisters traveling by new Transcontinental Railroad from Omaha, Nebraska to San Francisco, California. Sister Thomas Bernard [MacConnell (1926-)]. Boat to San Diego, California. Bishop Jean-Baptiste Salpointe (1825–1898) [Bishop of Arizona]. Trek of the Seven Sisters 1870 from San Diego to Tucson, Arizona. Sister Mary Murphy recreations of Trek of Seven Sisters. Opening St. Mary's Hospital in Tucson. CSJ native-American missions, hospitals. Reestablishing province at St. Mary's Academy in Los Angeles. Meaning of name of book, "All Things New".

[01:25:26.04] Other reflections. Greatest joy in religious life: living with Sisters. Looking at photos: photo of Sister Mary Williams in habit with her mother; Sister with two nieces; Sister with Jacqueline Powers Doud and Marcos McPeck Villatoro [American writer]; photo of CSJ celebration 2000s; two professional photos of Sister.

[01:27:57.13] [Director's comments].

[01:28:04.05] End of interview.